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IN A WILTSHIRE VALLEY.

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MRS. HAUGHTON.

London:
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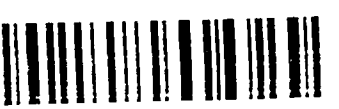
40, TAVISTOCK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1879.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IN A WILTSHIRE VALLEY.

CHAPTER I.

In these days of rapid ceaseless change—when all that once seemed most unlikely to be affected by the fashion of the day, is following the lead of the rest of the world—one is forced to the conclusion that few old ways or primitive customs can long survive to mark, as they have hitherto done, the difference between one county and another. Perhaps, therefore, a few rough sketches of life taken from a remote valley in Wiltshire, may not be wholly devoid of interest to others beside myself.

The inhabitants of my native valley were, like the peasantry of Dorsetshire, as laborious as they were ill-paid. They had a hard struggle to support themselves and their families; yet although

their life was one unceasing struggle against an almost crushing poverty, there were numbers who, to their credit be it spoken, contrived to preserve a respectable appearance, and keep clear of debt and the workhouse. And this with a cheerful trust and faith that would put richer men to the blush. It was of course on the helpless and aged that the burden of poverty fell the heaviest; and this was truly and forcibly expressed once by an old woman, who, speaking of the calls made upon her by some sick relations, answered the observation, we wondered how they could live in such circumstances, by saying, "We don't *live*, we *bides*."

Those who have had much experience in village life, can bear witness of the kindness shown by the poor towards each other in times of sickness or trouble. To those who know the poor only from books, or any other second-hand way, it would seem almost incredible how at such seasons, forgetting old feuds or jealousies, they will sit up night after night with a sick neighbour, with whom before the trial came they were very likely at daggers drawn; and this when a hard day's

work in the harvest field, or some even severer agricultural labour, might have seemed a sufficient reason against making the effort. Doing the kind act too, with an unconscious simplicity all the more heroic from its unselfishness. They would often take charge of a little helpless orphan, in village parlance, "a friendless child," who but for them would have been consigned to the tender mercies of the *Parish*, making no distinction between the little forlorn incumbrance and their own babes. Yet were their weekly wages in those days, on an average, but seven shillings, with an increase of one shilling at the busy times of the year. How then can we wonder that many had no better prospect than, after all their toil, to end their days as inmates of "*The House*,"—that bugbear of all village folks?

We used sometimes to say to our old friends, "You would surely be more comfortable, better cared for, better tended in the Workhouse than in this lonely cottage?" But no, the answer always was, "There was no liberty there; they could not have their drop of *teawater* at whatever hour they liked; nor please themselves about

going to bed, nor getting up; and (worst of all) they could never be alone for *one moment.*" In short, it was not their own home, the dearest possession an English man or woman can have.

One year, after having been absent some time, we were told by Mrs. M——, a fine handsome old woman, that owing to the bad winter and consequent want of work, her son and his family had been compelled by actual distress to go into the workhouse. "And how do you think they treated my daater-la?" she inquired, trembling with indignation at the mere recollection of the insult. "Oh, they treated her *shameful!* they *did,* 'twer downright *scandalous:* they put her in a bath, and washed her from head to foot." We all rather laughed at this, and E—— inquired whether the water had been cold, thinking that had possibly caused the grievance.

"*Cold waater?*" she cried, with horror; "no, 'twer hot waater; but such a thing had never happened to her before; it wer' a mercy she hadn't a died!"

When E—— by way of consoling her, told the good soul she herself had a cold bath every

morning, winter or summer, she was almost speechless with amazement. "She never had heer'd tell of such a thing, never! It was a mercy she hadn't a died too! 'Twer a wonder it hadn't a killed her long ago! Sometimes the doctor would order a baath for a babby, but there! she wouldn't have put un in for the world; poor little helpless *creaturs!*"

So no wonder the mothers of the sick, little, poor children are often disappointed by the non-success of the doctor's orders, if they are not better attended to than this one is.

CHAPTER II.

VERY peculiar were the maladies our poor people suffered from; and quite as peculiar the way in which they were described. One poor woman spoke of her children as "a perfect prospect of atomies!" We were one day told by a woman of not over brilliant intellect, "that she was suffering from a new complaint now, the giglums." But we could never discover exactly what this complaint was, nor whether it bore any resemblance to that which immediately attacked us on hearing of it.

The "gumbagurly" did duty for lumbago; St. Viper's dance, and St. Tantrum's fire, or the Sipless, were sometimes to be met with. "Inflymation" was "most in general"—to use their

own expression—supposed like all other ailments to require the assistance of wine; and it was never quite understood why it was refused at such times, the apparent unkindness being hardly qualified by the promise of their having whatever the doctor really ordered for their sick friend.

We were one day calling on Mrs. G——, a person who had lived in service in some gentleman's family, but who was then living with her husband in their own little homestead at the pretty hamlet of S., about a mile from the village, across pleasant fields. She was looking more than usually sallow, and struck by her sad and depressed looks, we inquired the cause. But alas! for our good manners. It was in the far-away young days when everything was provocative of mirth, and I grieve to have to confess it, but the recital of her troubles only roused our risible propensities irresistibly. "She herself had so violent a cough that it fairly coughed her out of bed at nights, and she had to hold on to the bed-post to prevent herself going through the floor." Unfeeling that we were, the asthmatic wheezing of the poor woman, which was really terrible, proved too much

for our gravity. And when she at last managed to gasp forth a few particulars about her husband, telling us, "he was eat up with the rhomatics, and could hardly cripple about he was so bad, having only the last Sunday groaned the whole way to church and back:" this announcement was received with laughter, all the more evident probably from the efforts most conscientiously made to suppress it. Fortunately there were some of the elders present, who preserved their gravity and made such apologies as were possible for the silly young ones.

The plain-speaking of the poor was sometimes very startling. "They be a sort of comical in their heads," would be said of the old and childish. "She's been took," denoted some very sudden attack of illness. Harriet W——, who suffered from severe headaches, told us one day "that her head would be better sometimes, and then it would be alto*geth*er t'other woys."

One poor girl suffered from fits, which as her mother phrased it, "were a'most too mighty for her."

"A weakly consecution" was a fruitful source

of lamentation to its unfortunate possessor; and who can wonder that "the lights rising," and "the windy spasms," were fearful to the sufferers from such mysterious maladies?

There was never any attempt to soften matters to an invalid, nor, as we should say, to cheer them. "She'll never get out of it, I don't expect as ever she *will*;" or, "She be just about bad, she *be;*" "I tells un a *may* get better, but *thyer*, there don't seem no likelihood of it at *present*, I can't say as how there *do*." And so on in the same strain. "Well *there*, I be better than I *have* a been, but not to say *well*," would be the cautious admission of another about her own health. "He beant never what you may call lusty, but he be newst as one" (much as usual) would be said by another.

The daughter of a small farmer, who had the advantage of attending the seminary for young ladies in the village, and who had (or was supposed to have), learned French, and the additional accomplishment of "playing on the top of the pyann," as an old servant of our's said,—was telling us about her mother, "Who

enjoyed such *very* bad health, and had such *vilent* spasms. Yes, indeed," she repeated, "I couldn't call them nothing else but vilent."

CHAPTER III.

A VERY special favourite of ours was old John Watts. He was a great age, being (I think) eighty-eight when he died; but he was a remarkably hale fine old man, and with the exception of deafness had not much to complain of. He often expressed his sorrow at not being able to hear the service in church, but declared his intention of never failing in his attendance on that account; and used to say, "that if he *did* hear anything he knew it would do him no harm." Once after an attack of illness which told greatly on our old friend, we were paying him a friendly visit, when he expressed his thankfulness for being so much recovered, and concluded his harangue with "I shall be able to

come to church the Fast-day, or Thanksgiving-day, or whatsomedever you may call it!" There was an importance almost amounting to pomposity in the old man's manner of speaking, which, combined with his childlike simplicity and honesty, were irresistibly comic.

Old John was not singular in his resolve of remaining a church-goer, though deprived of hearing. Ann W——, who was hopelessly deaf (and oh! what an infliction was a visit to her), assured me "she always intended to be constant to her church. For why? the 'postle said we were not to forsake the dizzembling of ourselves together. The 'postle *said* so, he *did;* and she could hear the proclamations and the organ when it played loud." Poor Ann was not very much pleased with the clergyman who took the duty one summer. "She had nothing to say against the *man*, but it was his deliverance was so bad, she could not hear him, sit where she would." I shouted to her as loud as I could, that I pitied her disappointment, but that really poor Mr. —— was not to blame. She was not to be convinced, and ever remained persuaded that

had his *deliverance* only equalled *himself*, she must have heard him perfectly ; "for she could hear the clerk say Amen when she sat close to him."

Going to wish her good-bye on one occasion, when we were leaving home for some months, I met her in the lane leading to her house, and told her my object in coming. She turned back with me, and re-entered the cottage ; for it was hopeless to attempt to make her hear in the open air. At last she heard. "Oh! so you be going away, be you?" she said. "Where's Miss Lisbeth?"

I explained that she was occupied and could not come, and I had come in her stead. "Well," she replied, "I be glad to see you, I be ; but I wants to see Miss Lisbeth. You don't *think* she'll come and see me before she goes away?"

I assured her it was impossible, but her calamity made it anything but a labour of love to explain matters and pacify her. At last she was sufficiently mollified to say as we parted, "Well! I 'spose I must 'scuse her *this* time, not but what

I thought as how she'd ha' come and seen me. However, I'll 'scuse her *this* time, you tell her so," she called, as I at last escaped, hoarse and tired with my efforts.

CHAPTER IV.

The clerk (whose Amens were audible even to poor Ann W——) had a very marked and peculiar pronunciation, which often gave much amusement to our friends, if they were unaccustomed to our Wiltshire accents. For instance, when the 69th Psalm occurred in the course of the service, he never failed to say "a bullock with harns and huffs," (the u in bullock having the same sound as in huffs). And "an alien to his mother's children" was, I really believe, dimly connected in his mind with the king of beasts (or as he would have said, beastesses), for he always said with a strong emphasis "an a *lion* to his mother's children."

Some great friends of ours lived in a charming old-fashioned place, called by the country people Wurr; *anglicé* Oare. In the same way they would

call oats, wutts; but in words beginning with w, the consonant was invariably omitted, thus,—'oman, 'ood, &c. "Nart eet" for not yet, might have puzzled a stranger.

Terrible was a word in great vogue to intensify the meaning of the word, whether for good or ill. "Terrible bad," was indeed bad; but "terrible" used alone, did not, as I once discovered, mean at all the same thing, for receiving the intelligence that "mother had had a terrible night," I naturally condoled with the daughter on hearing such a bad report; when she called out "Lawk! why it was terrible *good*, bless'ee!" "A terrible sight of fruit t'year" denoted an abundant crop, as did also "a main little few."

Terrify was much used to express annoyance, trouble or vexation. Thus the flies would terrify the horses in the hot weather. One day, saying to the gardener that I feared my little nephews were rather a hindrance to him in his work, he replied with more truth than politeness, "They be nice children enough, but they be a terrible terrify;" with an emphasis on the adjective, which spoke volumes, and of which it is hopeless

to attempt to convey an idea to any one unacquainted with the Wiltshire dialect in its native purity and vigour! He was a kind-hearted man, and submitted to a great deal from his little tormentors, who laboured under the delusion they assisted him in his work.

I was one day complimenting him on the size and beauty of his tomatoes, pronouncing that word in the usual way. "Them beant tomatoes," said he with his drawl,—almost the worst I ever heard,—"them be *tommytoes*." Consulting him about some shrubs we wished to have cut down, he touched an old lilac bush with a look of contempt, saying, "This here is a queer old choker, there beant no good in this one."

CHAPTER V.

Two old favourites of ours, an aged man and his wife, left their cheerful old-fashioned cottage, with its gay little garden (where the stocks were always so fine, and blossomed so early), for a house in Quality Court, an ambitious title neither justified by its appearance nor its inhabitants. The court consisted of two rows of houses, divided by a narrow walk; and lacking both fresh air and freedom. We rather condoled with the old couple on the change, but soon found our pity was misplaced. "It was close to the church, it was nearer *our* house, and it was a deal pleasanter than the old place." They were quite satisfied with the many advantages of their new abode; and above all, the people were "desperate neighbourly" in the adjoining houses.

Our poor people were very fond of using long words, which one wondered they could ever have had a chance of hearing. For instance applypo, for apropos, and déshabille, pronounced dishybill, were often used with the gravity befitting such high-sounding words. But caddle was the homely and expressive term for confusion or untidiness; and had a far more genuine ring about it than the former highflown words. But with many quaint and odd expressions peculiar to themselves,—often very forcible—such as "the bread is good, there's pruff (proof) in it" none of the older generation were ever guilty of misplacing their H's. That was left for the more highly educated schoolmasters of the present day to introduce, and fix in the minds of the younger race. Their elders would say, "a apple, a egg," which has no doubt a very harsh sound, but never could they have perpetrated such an atrocity as the following sentence, "'Ere's a *narse*, take care," which was one day screamed out close to our ears by a big boy to a little one under his charge, as a loose horse clattered up the village street. Damp warm weather was called muggy; if

changeable and stormy, cluttery, or casualty. A pert child would be called "just about peart." Vexing in the sense of grieving or distressing anyone, was very common. A mother, heart-broken at the loss of a child, would say, "I vexes about her terrible, I do." The verb to let, in it's old sense of to hinder, was much used. "I was let doing so by the wet," or anything. A mug with a handle was called a quirk.

Sprack, for strong and healthy, and *pure*, for quite well, were words entirely familiar to us, so that we were surprised when our friends would say sometimes, "Did you understand what so-and-so said to you?" and then perhaps acknowledged they had not the slightest idea of what they had been listening to.

CHAPTER VI.

MANY people have a conviction that Wiltshire consists solely of Salisbury Plain; with a few wretched villages scattered about amongst the sheep-folds, and we were often commiserated for living in such a bleak desolate country, as of course we had no spring flowers there! No assurances could persuade such people of the beauty of our hedgerows and copses; with their profusion of primroses, violets, wild hyacinths, and orchises, nor of the cowslips on the downs, and in the low-lying meadows, with the sure frequenter of cowslip-growing localities, the nightingale, whose song never failed to charm us yearly. Then, later, the wild campions gave way to the more lovely and delicate wild-roses and honey-suckles, the meadow-sweet, the royal

king-cups, and great golden-eyed marguerites. Nay, even the downs had their own peculiar flora, and very bright was the loveliness of the blue and white stitchworts, the lilac gentian, the pretty golden coronella, and the more delicate tinted cistus; with countless other flowers, whose names I have forgotten long since, only I must not leave out that pretty graceful harebell. Where the modern system of farming has broken up the downs, there I most willingly allow that nothing can be so ugly, so dreary, so wild and desolate as the Wiltshire downs! What used to be a vast expanse of grass, is now turned into as many miles of turnips, or ploughed fields, and it is only in the harvest time there is any redeeming feature in the view. But we did not live on the downs. "Our valley" was broad and sheltered, protected on the north by a range of downs, more varied in shape than is often the case with chalk hills; and on the south side by a range lower and less picturesque, which a few miles below the village turned away to the south-west, following the course of the stream, which flowing on through a succession of villages nestled in the river valley,

increased in volume until at S—— it was a fine river, steadily pursuing its course thence to the sea. The southern side of our valley presented a striking contrast to the northern half, consisting as it did entirely of arable land, with droves as they were called,—grass walks, that is, for the sheep, leading straight up to the foot of the downs at intervals. The northern division, which included the village, was very varied, and rich in pretty walks and drives, picturesque lanes abounding in oaks, elms, and as in all chalk countries, with superb beech trees. This has all been sadly changed of late years, and "our valley" has been shorn of its beauties to a lamentable extent; the combined effects of modern improvements, so-called, and high farming. It seems in every way ill-judged to reduce the lowlands to the state of the downs, as the beauty of the latter consisted in the smooth short grass; and the absence of any shelter, made the valley appear so much the prettier from the contrast. For delightful as the downs were in soft bright weather with the exquisite, pure, bracing air, yet I freely confess that in cold weather, or in rain

—or worse still, snow, nothing could be so painfully exposed, so cold, so sad and mournful in their absolute solitude, as they were; in fact as our shepherd expressed himself to one of my brothers, who was saying he must find it dull on the downs on a winter's day, replied, "and that it be, sir, *dismal* dull."

CHAPTER VII.

Our people were a primitive race, and generally applied to us to assist them in their necessities, having a great idea we could supply all their wants, from "a drop of milk for the sick baby," to the embrocation for rheumatism, for which we became renowned, and which was pronounced very superior "to the doctor's stuff," and besides "it was to be had for the asking!" "A bit of print to make me a gownd," was a frequent request. "You really seem to think we are made up of old shoes and bits of print," said C—— once, when an unusual number of petitions had exhausted her patience.

The love of finery and "artificials," as they called them, made great inroads of late years; and it was no rare event to meet on Sunday the woman, who a day or two before had been asking

for some cast-off things, in a gaudy shawl, and a bonnet a blaze of red geraniums, or yellow hollyhocks. This was vexatious. "It's the foolish pride of this place, ma'am, that's what it is," said an old servant of ours, who had married and settled in the village, of which she herself was a native.

The older women presented a most favourable contrast to their smarter sisters, in their neat tidy cotton dresses, and kerchiefs,—turnovers as they called them—pinned down in front, white frilled caps, black bonnets and red cloaks. There was one thing which always seemed to strike our visitors as strange, so I conclude it was peculiar to our people, namely, the women always wearing their bonnets in the house; it being quite the exception for even young girls to be without them.

Amongst our favourite old people, old Dame Page stood pre-eminent. She was the very model of an old village dame; the words suited her so exactly. She was so old-fashioned, and always dressed to perfection. Her grey hair was cut in a short fringe on her forehead (an old fashion

revived in these day with a less pleasing result), and her spotless cap, with its deep frill, was bound round her head with a black ribbon. She always wore a checked handkerchief crossed in front, and pinned on either side; very tight short sleeves ending at the elbow with a frill; looking always the very picture of neatness. Call at any hour you liked, and the dear old woman was always the same. An example to all the rest of the village women, which we used heartily to wish they would copy.

She lived with her son, and took entire charge of his cottage, and his little motherless girl. And here I must mention an instance of the plain speaking so common amongst our poor in cases of illness. Little Jane had, it was supposed, "caught a *chill*," that fruitful source of half their maladies. And through some mismanagement or ignorance, it had gone on from bad to worse, till it was feared the pretty little blue-eyed maiden would never completely regain the use of the leg in which the chill had *pitched*, to use their own expression. No one could have nursed the little one more tenderly than did the

good old grandmother; but as the hope of amendment gradually faded away, she felt more and more strongly the difficulty the little sufferer would have eventually in gaining her livelihood. And one day, in answer to our inquiries, she said, "No, Jane was no better, and she hoped if she was never to be no better, it would please God to take her soon; as if she was to be a cripple all her life, she would be no pleasure to herself and a burden to everyone else." The poor child sitting meekly by, and hearing it all; but not probably feeling it so much for herself as we did for her. But harsh as the remark sounded it was not unkindly meant. The good dame only gave utterance to what she really thought, and felt, to be the greatest happiness for the sick child.

However, contrary to all expectations, little Jane improved in health, and recovered sufficiently to be able to get about on crutches, and assist her grandmother in the house work, before the latter was taken to her rest at a great age. Always cheerful and contented, no one ever heard a murmur from her lips. "Quite well, thank'ee

ma'am, and hope you are the same," would be her kindly greeting; and latterly she would add, "and Jane too—her be nicely now; her be quite sprack again, God be thank-ed!"

Certainly the contrast between Dame Page and some others of her standing, with the younger women, was most striking and disheartening. The long skirts of the latter trailing in the mud, long loose hanging sleeves flopping into wash tubs, and the crowning honour of black caps, which from long use, and from possessing the charm of not requiring soap and water, acquired a tint it defies my powers to describe. We often bewailed the degeneracy of the age, not that all deserved the censure, far from it. But still there was a very general falling away with respect to those very dreadful black caps.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was one thing which ever amazed us, and with which our long familiarity in no way reconciled us, and this was the absolute freedom of the children from all parental control. As soon as they were able to show a will of their own, it seemed to be looked on as a matter of course that they were to be allowed to exercise the same. And the attempts to coerce them, which were occasionally made, were as unsuccessful as injudicious.

Ann Bull, (a very common surname with us), stopped me one day to say she much wished for a visit from H——, in order that she might speak to her little boy, and try to persuade him to go to school, as he had taken such a dislike to it; nothing she could say would in-

duce him to go. The master had been himself, but all in vain, and Ann thought H——, who was very fond of children, might have some influence with him.

I inquired which of the boys it was, and found the refractory hero was six years old.

"I've whipped him," cried his mother; "I've whipped him till his back is covered with wheals; and it ain't a bit of good. He has turned bad all of a sudden, and won't do nothink he is told to; particklar he won't go to school."

And go he did not, all H——'s eloquence being, as she expected, entirely wasted. Poor little man! His mother was much amused at our being so tender-hearted as to pity him for being whipped.

Girls of twelve or thirteen would decide as to whether they should go out to service or not; and their mothers would seem quite content to let the matter be settled as they liked. Sometimes, but not very often, one heard complaints.

A woman told me her daughter of eighteen

would go to Australia, although she and her husband equally objected to her doing so. How impossible it seems to those in a higher grade of life to imagine a girl taking such a step! The same girl repented of her determination when she had started; and, when about nine miles from home, wished to return, but it was then too late, and, as her mother said solemnly to me, her father would not hear of it.

"Louisa," says he, "you have gone against us all through; and now you must stick to it. Go you would; and now, go you shall!"

It is to be hoped the poor girl had only a passing misgiving.

A boy who had been long ill, was told by the doctor the only hope for his recovery was going to the infirmary at Salisbury, and his mother was most anxious he should go. But not he! He stopped in the middle of his dinner, and, sticking his knife and fork bolt upright, said, "It's not a bit of good talking, mother; for I wun't and I shaan't, and I shaan't and I wun't; and so *thyur!*"

It would be absolutely incredible to some of

my readers how certain he was to have his own way, and that in despite of the doctor's orders and his mother's wishes—an urchin of ten years old.

CHAPTER IX.

The very rough handling the little ones get may incline them to revolt, as it would most surely make more tenderly nurtured children droop and pine.

C—— and I had taken a jorum of soup to Mrs. E—— one day; and, whilst talking to her, set it down on the table.

She was turning away to seek a jug into which to transfer the contents of the can, when one of her grandsons, a hungry little imp, just high enough to reach the table, made a spring at the handle, and upset a good deal of the broth on the floor.

"Mischievious little *blockhead!*" roared the angry grandmother.

One of us saved the child, whilst the other caught the can; and so, amidst our laughter,

he escaped for the nonce with no further punishment than the above candid expression of his grandmother's wrath.

Mrs. E—— gradually recovered her composure sufficiently to excuse herself to us for the outbreak by saying, "He was that artful and designing, she'd never seen anything like it—never!"

Another day we were passing some cottages, and stopped to speak to some women who were in their gardens. Up clambered a fine little boy on the wicket-gate, and began swinging backwards and forwards, with his chin so close to some jagged and rusty nails, that it seemed if he slipped the least, he must tear his little fat throat. As he would not get down for me, I touched his mother, and showed her the child's danger, entreating her to lift him down, which she instantly did, clutching hold of him, and saying, in the severest manner, "You get down this minute, Gearge. I never *seen* such an unbelieving child as you are, *never!*" shaking him, and sending him off with a jerk rough

enough to have hurt a child of such tender years.

But Gearge, who was only two years old, did not seem to care the least, and trotted off sturdily to find some other amusement, very likely as "unbelieving" as that which had been so summarily ended.

CHAPTER X.

WHITSUNTIDE and the Village Feast in September were the two holidays of the year. They reckoned their children's ages from these seasons. "He'll be so-and-so come Feast," &c. They were the favourite times for weddings, and the display of new bonnets. At Whitsuntide the friendly clubs were in their glory. On Whit-Monday the old club, with its dark red and purple ribbons, and the pretty old flags, had the first turn; and on Whit-Tuesday the new club had its innings. This was an innovation of later years; and its formation had given rise to much bitterness and ill-will. The members of this club wore blue and white ribbon rosettes, and had the gayest purple flags. One in particular was very effective, with two hands clasped on a red and silver ground,

surmounted by a motto, "Walk in love," or "Love the brotherhood;" I forget the words now, (which, as the club owed its existence to a quarrel, and half the village vowed enmity to it, as the possible if not probable cause of the ruin of the old established one), was looked upon as insulting or magnanimous as the case might be. However, we of course had nothing to do with all that. We were considered to have fulfilled our part, if we attended the service specially given for them, and made their own by a sermon appropriate to the occasion, and were ready to receive the club when in the course of the afternoon we were honoured by a visit from it, attended by its band.

This was the great event of the day to us as children, when the band, preceded by the standard-bearers, and followed by all the members of the club bearing long wands, with the colours of the club tied to the top, entered the garden, and arranged themselves on the old fashioned ring before the house door. They used to give us several airs, and then came the crowning treat of the whole, to which the little ones looked

forward with delight—the playing God save the Queen, every one taking his hat off, and ready to wave it vigorously when the cheers were given for the Queen. After a few kind words of thanks to them for coming, they all marched round the ring in the same order they had entered, and we heard the band till the evening, as the club visited the farmers and chief people of the village.

Sometimes the band consisted of native talent only, at other times it was strengthened by players from the neighbouring villages. On one occasion they were complimented on their band being very efficient. "Yes, it isn't often as you hear such music as *that*, ma'am!" was the triumphant rejoinder.

I have mentioned their fondness for Whitsuntide for celebrating their weddings. Whether it is the case in other country districts or not, I do not know, but with us, neither the parents of bride or bridegroom ever accompanied their children to church on their marriage; there was the best man and the bridesmaid, but no other friend or relation. When the ceremony was over they

generally spent the rest of the day in parading the village arm-in-arm; or were sometimes to be seen all four seated in a tax-cart, going out for a day's pleasuring. And the next day saw them at their work again; a plan which may perhaps have its advantages in some ways.

CHAPTER XI.

The women in our valley worked in the fields as regularly as the men, and there must have been a strange fascination in the life, for those who once took to it, never settled down again to indoors work. It is a very hard life, especially for the young girls, and at a very early age the women looked prematurely worn and haggard. Still, whether it was the result of passing so much of their time in the keen bracing Wiltshire air that counteracted the effects of hard work, scanty food, and insufficient apparel, certain it is that our old people, both men and women, lived to a very great age, many being nearer ninety than eighty at the time of their death.

Our poultry woman, "Old Dame," as she was always called, *par excellence*, told us that when she first came to this village sixty years or so before, every cottage possessed a spinning-wheel, and all the inhabitants were accustomed to spin. Stephen (her husband) always used to spin "night 'ems," when they were first married. She had come from B——, a place some fifteen or twenty miles from our village, and in all those many years she had never revisited her early home above once or twice.

"You must be very old, dame," I said, "to be talking of what you did sixty years ago."

"And that I be," she replied. "I be vourzcour years and zex, na, and that's a grite ige na," she added, after a moment's pause. She was in a very chatty mood that day, and told us how she had come to the village seventy years before, and had married some years after that.

"She had been very happy with her old man, who had been just about a good husband to her."

Never having heard what her name had been, I asked her if she could remember it, and she was much amused at the idea. "She minded

it quite well. She had been Betty Groy" (*anglicé* Grey). She was one of those who wore a black bonnet, red cloak and a blue gown. Poor old dame; she outlived her faithful old man, and became childish and helpless after his death. But she lived with her son, an old man about seventy, and was cared for and looked after by his wife and daughters.

Near our old dame lived an old body who was a character in her way. She lived quite alone, her daughter having married and gone to London with her husband. She was full of quaint sayings, and nothing she liked better than that one should sit down, and let her talk as long as she fancied. (N.B. There is no surer road to the hearts of the poor, than listening to them with interest, and never being in a hurry.) She was also very fond of being read to. "Read I the *ighth* chapters of Romans," she used to say, "it's such an exanimun chapter," or what was intended to be equally appreciative a term, "such an experimental chapter!"

One very old woman, (whom we used to call the old hundred and one,) whose real name I

have totally forgotten, lived to be a hundred and four before her death.

She lived with some relations who were very old people themselves, but who were very kind to her, and proud of her great age. She had the full possession of her faculties, could hear and talk sensibly, and dressed herself daily, despising all help. She too, as all the old people did, liked to be read to, and she also liked the contents of the basket which was carried to her by the reader.

Her parting salutation was generally, "You come and see I again. Bring I some coyke, I likes coyke! Goodboy, goodboy," giving us her poor shrivelled hand, like yellow parchment, to shake.

I asked her one day if she remembered the war, or anything which happened when she was young. But no, she was no scholard, she said, nobody wasn't when she was young. They were a deal better off in these days. She told us she had been born at B——, a village some five miles off; and with the exception of having been once or twice over the downs to E——, a lonely village on

Salisbury plain, she had never left her husband's village since she had been married and settled there, about eighty years or so before! "She didn't hold by gadding."

CHAPTER XII.

THE villagers were always very cautious in expressing their opinions about anyone, seldom or never committing themselves. It was almost impossible to get from them anything decided, whether for praise or disapprobation. "I never heerd tell no harm on her;" or "She'll be a nice 'oman enough as far as I *knows;*" "I never *heerd* nothing against un," and so on. Faint praise certainly!

But though unwilling to speak about their neighbours to us, the open manner in which they would speak before them was to say the least of it, embarrassing. "Your poor husband seems to hear less well," we remarked one day to the sexton's wife. "He's more stupid than deaf," was the reply; and yet she was an excellent wife.

"Mother's not right in her head," said a daughter, a very nice respectable young woman; "she don't know what she's about half her time." Poor mother sitting by and listening to her daughter's opinion, and, as far as we could judge, perfectly able to understand the, to us, rather awkward announcement.

"He's too much of a man to think there is anything *he* can't do," said an old woman of her brother, who, poor man, was half-witted, and absolutely dependent on his sister for support. One can only suppose they are used to it. For they generally spoke their minds pretty freely, as the saying is. I was sitting late one summer's evening with Mrs. M——, (whose daughter-in-law had been so ill-used in the workhouse, with respect to the warm bath she had been compelled to take), when her husband came in from his work. I felt a little doubtful as to his identity, for the men were rarely at home unless they were ill or out of work, and were seldom to be seen in company with their wives and daughters.

"Why, that's our measter!" cried Mrs. M——

which settled the matter as far as I was concerned. "Well, *thyur*, I didn't know you at first," he returned; "you looks a deal fresher than you used to it. I said so to my missus on Sunday, she be a deal fresher, that one, than she wur, she be; and so you *be*," he added positively. This was at least cheering; very different to the following comment on H——'s appearance, who was told by some one, on a day when she was feeling tired or ill, "*You* looks bad, you *do*; *you* won't hold out long, I don't expect you will;" a gloomy view which was happily not realised.

We were so accustomed to the quaint expressions, and peculiar idioms of our poor people, that we could hardly understand how totally incomprehensible they were to those who were unused to them. M—— went with me to see Mrs. H——, who had a sick child, and in answer to M——'s inquiries as to whether she had any more children, Mrs. H—— replied, "She had a main (pronounced *mine*) on 'em." "Nine of them!" cried M—— in wonder, for the mother looked very young; "that is a number indeed!"

"A main on 'em," repeated the poor woman, fairly puzzled herself, and I was forced to clear up the difficulty, neither side seeing where the mistake lay.

CHAPTER XIII.

I MUST now mention an instance of superstitious ignorance really astounding in these enlightened days; it may be a common one in other rural districts, but to us it was a new idea, in fact I could scarcely believe that such a nice sensible person as Sarah Jennings, could be guilty of such folly. The case was this: her only son had fallen into bad health, and was suffering from an abscess in his side; and it was in answer to my inquiries she told me she knew what to look to now, for she had boiled an egg, and buried it by an ant's nest, and when the ants had eaten the egg, the abscess would be cured. I was so amazed I could scarcely believe I heard aright, or imagine that she could seriously entertain such an idea. But she did most seriously, and believed it most

firmly; there was no use in trying to persuade her to have advice, she was impracticable, and was not convinced, even when her poor boy, after lingering a long time, gradually faded away, till death released him from his sufferings. Her husband Daniel (always called Dannel), was much looked up to and respected. At one time it only rested with his decision as to whether half the young men in the village went to Australia or not. But Dannel got a very good situation as overseer to some farm in an adjoining county. And it was not till some years after this, that he took his wife out to the Cape, where her family had gone before.

The first essay in emigration took place in our village about forty years ago. After that, it became at one time a very popular movement, and numbers departed to try their luck in the antipodes; at one time Canada had the preference, but afterwards Australia (familiarly called Austillia) carried the day, owing to the support given by government to the scheme.

The letters written home by those who had emigrated were often shown to us by their friends,

with a perfect confidence that we should find them as interesting as they did. The account of their new life was often very amusing, and the loving mention of each member of the family by name, coupled with affectionate words and messages, not only to them but to old friends and neighbours were touching in their simplicity and earnestness. They often urged their friends to join them, but very rarely returned themselves. Many no doubt were deterred by the long voyage and the expense attendant on it.

The superior comforts, even luxuries they were able to get in their new country, made them more desirous of inducing their friends to follow their example than to return themselves to what might prove, as before, a cheerless struggle for existence.

Amongst the earliest of the departures for Australia were a family of the name of Amor,—most respectable people. The wife was a straw plaitter, and did "a good stroke of business" in that line, in the days when bonnets were made to order, instead of being bought as they are now ready made and cheap at the village shop. Mrs. Amor was a superior, nice-mannered woman, and

we were much amused, and even more surprised to find one day, when calling on her, that she had sent her two little girls to the wharf, that they might see the canal and the barges, as that, she considered, would give them some idea of the sea, and prevent their being so frightened when they got on board ship.

CHAPTER XIV.

Scripture names had a fair share of popularity amongst our people, but were not so much used, as I have understood they are in the more northern parts of England.

Isaac, pronounced Isic, was rather a favourite. We had one Nicodemus, whose surname was Dear. Martha, and Mimy, for Jemima, were common; but Emma Jane, Sarah Ann, and Phœbe—pronounced Phibby—Jane carried the day. Fine names were not very frequent, but we had some brilliant exceptions; such as Sylvanus, (shortened into Venus)—one Florentia, the good old woman was so used to be called Florry, she would scarcely have recognised her own name. Clarissa and Tryphena were rare; Matildas and Amelias by the dozen to be met with. Louisa too

was a favourite name. Alma was given in some few instances after the battle, and sounded funny enough in conjunction with some of our village names. Albert was gradually coming into fashion, but was still very rare in our time; anything unusual took a long time to naturalise. Joyce and Avis had a quaint pretty sound; Amy was very much used by the older generation, but one seldom met it with the children. Esther was rather a favourite name. As a rule our people preferred the ordinary names of Richard, William, Thomas, James, &c. Although we had one old friend called Alban Moon!

I should scarcely do justice to my old friends' dialects were I to omit to mention the very curious form they give to their possessive pronouns.

Her'n, his'n, she's, shis'n's are, it seems to me decidedly peculiar, at least I have never met with them anywhere else. *Shisn's* grandmother for *her* grandmother, would puzzle a stranger.

They would distinguish between her'n and shis'n in this way: they would say, "That bean't *her'n*, that be *shisn's*." To us their expressions

were so familiar we scarcely bestowed a passing smile on them.

Betsy A. (a former laundry-maid of ours), when complaining to us that some of her husband's family had gradually ceased to write to them from Canada, where they had emigrated some years before, ended her story by saying, "It do seem strange they can't write to *us*, or to *we*, or to *sumat!*" A sentence which for vagueness as well as for comprehensiveness could scarcely be equalled.

They would say, "Her told I, her *did*." "She gived it to I." And would turn and twist their sentences till no one unfamiliar with their language could have imagined what they wished to express.

CHAPTER XV.

The year of the Great Exhibition in 1851 was a memorable one in our village annals. A perfect mania seized half the population to go and see the wonder for themselves. Numbers of the younger and stronger men walked the whole way to London and back in order to satisfy their curiosity. Even in our remote valley the sensation was "prodigious." One of two brothers in the village went also. But being an elderly man, he was probably glad of a conveyance; and doubtless considered the journey by the Great Western as no small adventure in itself. We were in the Palace one day, when from the gallery we chanced to look down on the dark swarthy face and burly form of H——, *the* blacksmith and farmer. He was absorbed in the

contemplation of the wonders and beauties of a case of dolls, and looked so unusually clean and spruce, we watched him with much amusement.

When he was afterwards told we had been there and saw him below, his astonishment knew no bounds.

"Did 'em! did 'em!" was all he could ejaculate.

H—— informed his friends he had seen the Queen and Prince Albert, and the Royal children with them, "and the Queen was not a bit taller than Miss E——!" Amongst others he told my father, who was greatly tickled at the familiar illustration.

These very slight sketches of life in a Wiltshire valley are, I fear, too rough and disjointed to lay claim to more than one merit, namely, of truth. Already many old customs have changed, others will doubtless follow; and it was more with the view of affording a glimpse of manners and ways, which seem to me rather original, that I have put these recollections together in this unpretending style, than from any more ambitious view.

It is now more than twenty years since the old home was broken up; a long time for these days, and no doubt now were I to return there I should find many old familiar ways and manners had disappeared, before the increasing progress of the day. Many things improved; wages higher, education more carefully attended to. In the place of the old white-washed thatched cottages, with roses and honey-suckles, neat little ugly red brick houses (no longer called housen, but 'ouses), not picturesque certainly, but more in accordance with modern notions. And although the old people never liked the change from the ingle with its settle on either side of the fire, where they could sit and warm their feet in the embers, yet no doubt all this will come "quite natural-like" to the younger and different generation.

In writing of these long past days, and jotting down memories bound up with the thoughts of my old home, there has been pleasure, as well as a mingling of pain and sorrow that it is all now so completely passed out of my present life.

We were once going over the Gardens at W—— (still I beg leave to say in Wiltshire), when my

father admired the gravel walks so much ... asked the person who was showing us round whether the gravel came from his brother's gravel pits at A——? "No, sir," was the answer given with much dignity, "we find it about the park and grounds, spontaneous, and as it were promiscuous!"

That these simple anecdotes possess much the same attributes as the W. gravel, will, I fear, be too evident to my readers; and I can hardly venture to hope they will afford them as much amusement as the worthy official's remark gave to us.

THE END.

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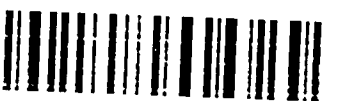
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